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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to be a tool to help those involved in the superintendent selection process. Section titles reflect the guide's contents. "The Decision to Seek a Superintendent"; "The Case for Using a Search Consultant"; "Setting a Timeline"; "Involvement of Parents, Citizens, Students and Staff"; "Describing the Person Sought and the Position"; "The Recruitment Brochure and Advertising"; "Defining the Application Process"; "Initial Screening of Applications"; "Initial Interviews"; "Planning Finalist Interviews and Activities in the District"; "Gathering and Evaluating Information about Finalists"; "Deliberating Upon a Final Choice"; "Negotiating a Contract"; and "Final Board Action to Ratify a Contract." Appended are a model superintendent contract; samples of a request for proposal for consultant services, various worksheets, a board-superintendent working agreement, and a superintendent evaluation form; and a number of interview tips. (WFA)

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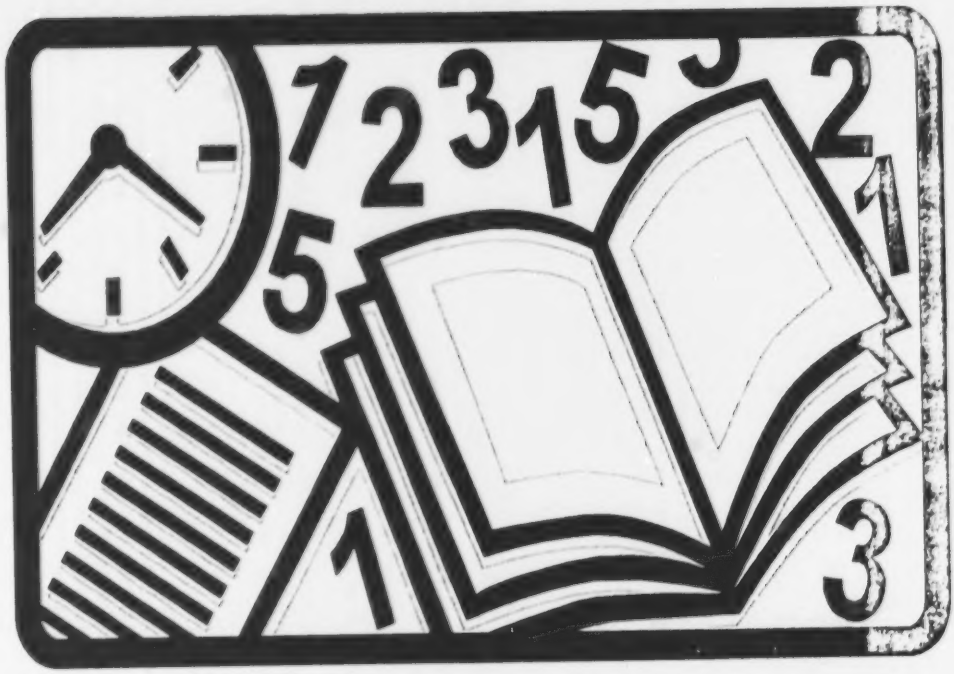
Superintendent Search



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Introduction

The selection of a superintendent is among the most significant decisions any school district board of directors will make. The superintendent should be the person and office through which the direction set by the board is carried out. The working relationship that develops between the board and superintendent is thus absolutely critical and the selection of the superintendent provides the initial definition to that relationship. As befits a decision of this importance, it is one that should be arrived at with care. And, as is also frequently true in other critical endeavors, the process of arriving at that decision is time consuming, hard work.

Throughout its decades of work on behalf of school board members, the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) has amassed years of professional experience, and the collective experience of thousands of school board members, related to effective superintendent search. That extensive experience forms the basis of this handbook, and also provides a reservoir of advice that can be contacted directly at WSSDA. This guide has been constructed to bring together information found helpful to many school districts — it is offered for the use of school directors as one of the tools to help them achieve a sound result in the superintendent selection process.

Dr. Michael R. Boring is a retired school administrator with experience in several various sized districts, including three positions as a superintendent. He retired from the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) in 2001 and works as an educational consultant, including assisting school boards with superintendent searches.

It is important to note that some of the advice and tools contained herein speak to matters governed by law. This guide is not a legal document and the information cannot be certified as legal advice. That disclaimer notwithstanding, the guide has been reviewed by qualified legal counsel as a means of providing practical scrutiny of the contents. As with all serious legal questions affecting a local school district, school directors are advised to consult legal counsel about specific questions pertaining to their district.

The Decision to Seek a Superintendent

The decision to seek a superintendent will be prompted by a variety of events — some of these are connected to a natural progression of service: resignation to leave for another position or retirement. In those cases, the need to select a replacement is straightforward and this publication provides information for proceeding in that direction. It seems prudent, however, to delay the beginning of that discussion shortly to comment upon some of the circumstances leading to a superintendent search that may be out of the ordinary and unusually difficult.

Health Events

There are occasions in which the superintendent of a school district experiences health problems that impair his or her ability to continue in full time service. This kind of circumstance requires careful deliberation on the part of the board and the superintendent in determining whether part time service is reasonable or whether resignation and replacement is the best alternative.

Some superintendent employment contracts contain provisions to guide the board and superintendent through the decision making process. Legal counsel may be prudent no matter how agreeably the decisions surrounding these health issues are reached.

The sequence of the board in seeking part time or full time superintendent service must be constructed carefully to insure that the needs of the district are met and the rights of the incumbent superintendent are also met. Temporary assistance for the school district while final determinations are settled may be necessary and prudent. In such a case, the assistance of legal counsel and a discussion with executive staff of WSSDA and the WASA would all be of benefit.

Terminations and Buy-Outs

Another scenario that may be experienced by a local school district is the wish to employ a new superintendent before the contract for the incumbent superintendent has run its term. This may occur due to a failure of the incumbent superintendent to fulfill the terms of his or her contract, and the district may then terminate the contract for cause. There will usually be a substantial process of deliberation as to whether the district has adequate grounds to terminate for cause. Any decision to seek a new superintendent should obviously be delayed until the district's position is clarified legally.

It is generally true that should the district not have adequate grounds to terminate for cause then the primary alternatives are to retain the superintendent until the contract runs to term or "buy out" the remainder of the contract. This latter circumstance brings up the final situation to be mentioned before proceeding with the search discussion generally.

There have been some instances in the state involving a decision by the board of directors of a school district to terminate a superintendent's contract prior to its termination date. A superintendent's contract is typical of other contracts in that it is binding upon both parties. Should the school district wish to terminate the contract early, the normal supposition is that the district is liable to pay out the remainder of the financial obligations created by that contract. Clearly, this is a decision of grave magnitude. It may ultimately be the best action to take, but the financial, educational and community impacts must be given very serious deliberation. As with all of the scenarios mentioned in the immediately preceding paragraphs, it is critical that legal counsel be part of the deliberative process from the outset. Legal counsel often serves as the board's negotiator as discussions leading toward a settlement are conducted. It is also prudent to make early contact with the executive staff of WSSDA and WASA for discussion and information that can be of great benefit to the school district.

The Search Season

These few unique situations referred to above are not the norm. In most cases, the decision to seek a new superintendent is arrived at in a manner that includes a resignation or retirement with the clear need to move forward to find a new superintendent. A major factor in the specific action of the school district is the timing of the decision. The conventional wisdom regarding superintendent searches is

that "early is better". Historically, board members and administrators have felt that the earlier a school district could announce a superintendent opening, the more likely it would be to gather a large, well qualified applicant pool.

The logic of that view is still sound — it is usually true that incumbent superintendents and other interested applicants in current employment will feel more freedom to pursue an opening that is known months in advance of the start date. In a general sense, an announcement and inception of a search in late fall or early winter will permit a longer application/ selection period than a late search. Many potential candidates will feel that their application in an early search gives their home district or employer a much better chance to find a replacement should they be the successful candidate. This confidence tends to help enrich the applicant pool.

The Interim Option

The reciprocal of this reasoning is that a later announcement of a superintendent vacancy may cause the district to consider whether it would be best served to pursue a regular search or to consider a temporary appointment to allow a longer period to search for a permanent superintendent. In a typical year, several districts make this determination and contract with a person to serve as superintendent for a specific, temporary period (usually a school year). The individuals selected to fill an interim position may be someone of known skill within the school system or an outside person who offers adequate skills and background.

If a school district makes this determination and there is a suitable person known to the board of directors, that person can be appointed directly. The board may also choose to advertise the temporary opening and conduct a "mini-search" for this interim superintendent. There are usually people available in the state with an interest in serving in an interim capacity. A valuable resource for locating them would be the executive staff of WASA or search consultants with contacts in the administrative community. Passage of "Retire-Rehire" legislation in 2001 may enrich the pool of qualified interim candidates.

Applicant Pool

The availability of qualified persons interested in and willing to apply for the position of superintendent of schools is difficult to describe accurately. There are certain known variables of which board members should be aware.

1. The number of applicants for a typical superintendent position has diminished over time. Twenty years ago, a superintendent position in a district of 12,000 students would attract perhaps 50 applicants. That number today could be half of that, and in some cases, even lower. The number of applicants for smaller districts has diminished as well with some pools having five or fewer. There are a variety of reasons for this phenomenon including:
   - ❑ Relatively fewer persons seeking training in specific preparation for the superintendent role;
   - ❑ A growing reluctance on the part of knowledgeable people to undertake the severe stress and strain of the position;
   - ❑ The economic and family costs of relocation; and
   - ❑ The growth in number of two-profession couples with complex relocation needs.
2. The number of superintendent positions open or changing annually has increased dramatically over the past five years. Beginning with the school year 1997-98, when the number of openings was in the 40 – 50 range, the number has climbed for the year 2001-02 to the 50 to 60 + range. Obviously, this growth in the number of openings or changes spreads the applicant pool over a larger field and tends to contribute to the lowered number of applicants for a given position. A corollary result of the larger number of openings is the growth in the number of applicants for jobs who withdraw their application because of another offer. This also affects the range of choice for local boards of directors when the time for a final decision arrives.

Nontraditional Candidates

It is generally known that in the State of Washington, there is no legal requirement at the state level that a superintendent hold a superintendent credential. The requirement for such a certificate was rescinded in Washington approximately 30 years ago in the interests of permitting a broad range of applicant backgrounds.

Generally, this relaxation of the requirement was directed at people from non-education fields; i.e. business, the military, other government work, etc. The move also gave greater latitude to educators to move into these positions without a superintendent certificate or before the training for a certificate was completed. This has definitely increased the potential universe of applicants and Washington state has seen a significant number of such nontraditional candidates appointed to superintendent positions.

The majority of school districts, however, maintain the requirement that applicants hold a superintendent credential, be able to qualify for one or be willing to attain one after employment. If one were to examine the reasons that local districts have retained this requirement, it is doubtless linked to the complexity of finance, school law, educational requirements/reform, the political structure of the state and an understanding of teaching generally.

One of the decisions each school board of directors must make when determining to seek a new superintendent is whether a credential should be required. A district may leave the door open by stating that a superintendent credential would be preferred, would be desirable, would be helpful, etc. This allows the board to give such a qualification due consideration, but also permits flexibility to consider an alternative candidate.

The Case for Using a Search Consultant

There are two primary alternatives available to a school district in terms of carrying out a superintendent search:

1. Appoint someone local to do the work — a person from the board and/or people from the school staff to carry out the search, or
2. Contract with an individual, group or firm to carry out a search.

The Washington State School Directors' Association recommends that a school board of directors engage consultant services. The reasons for this recommendation are based upon the years of experience that WSSDA has had with the search process and the perspective gained from serving local school districts on a daily basis for many years. Some of the contributing points include the following:

1. The time involved in planning, coordinating and supporting the conclusion of a superintendent search is a major commitment. Most board members and staff members have relatively full schedules in their regular working and personal lives. The various tasks involved in a search combine to create a relentless responsibility that is usually beyond the discretionary time available to board or staff members.
2. The selection of a superintendent is best viewed as a corporate decision for a board of directors. The appointment of one or two board members to coordinate a search may create an imbalance of knowledge of applicants that can unduly influence the selection.
3. The person ultimately selected as superintendent should be viewed as an impartial, objective manager as he or she assumes the position. The involvement of staff members in directing the search process may contribute to an impression that some staff members are closer to the new person.
4. A competent search consultant will have several helpful characteristics to contribute to the school district's effort in the search process which will include several or all of the following:
   a. A knowledge of the critical skills, abilities and qualifications necessary to the superintendent position.
   b. Often, successful personal experience as a school superintendent, sometimes for more than one school system.
   c. A network of contacts in the professional educational community to help locate and assess candidates.
   d. Expertise in the technology associated with current search and job placement work; e.g. web based listing services, 24 hour communication facilities, personal command of word processing and data management programs, access to copying, FAX equipment, graphics services, printing, mailing and other document services.
   e. A separate office(s) with multiple mail services, confidential filing capacity.
   f. A personal schedule that permits complete commitment to the search with the intense work of mailings, recruitment, screening, reference checking, scheduling of interviews, meetings with the board, staff, students, community, etc.
   g. A perspective that provides understanding of the specific needs of Washington state and how those needs relate to the educational community across the country.
   h. Knowledge of how to help assure compliance with anti-discrimination regulations in the application process, screening activities, interviewing and selection activities.
   i. A working relationship with key organizations such as WSSDA, WASA, the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators, colleges, universities, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and other consultants.

How to Select a Consultant

The considerations above have contributed to the belief by the WSSDA Board of Directors and Executive Staff that school boards are best advised to seek the assistance of a consultant in the superintendent search. The Association provides information to school districts in locating and evaluating such assistance. School directors are encouraged to approach the selection of a consultant in a manner similar to that used in seeking other professional services. A sample *Request for Proposal* is included in Appendix 1 of this handbook that contains information and questions to help structure the selection of a consultant. There are lists of consultants active in Washington available through WSSDA and WASA. Executive staff members of both associations are familiar with most of the consultant currently providing service and can help in determining a mailing list for a district's Request for Proposal.

Cost

A final comment about the cost of such services is in order. Typically, the cost of consultant services for a superintendent search are influenced by the size of school district, the number of individuals or size of firm involved in a search, the timing of a search, etc. In terms of the actual figures involved, quotations of costs tend to fall within the range of $3,500 to in excess of $20,000 depending upon the variables mentioned earlier. Boards should fully evaluate the entire proposal and experience each consultant brings to the district's search. The lowest cost is not always the best deal and the highest cost is not proof of the best consultant. Instead the board should rely upon the experience and references of the consultant, the board's own perceptions about the effectiveness of a specific consultant in working with that particular board, and, of course, the reasonableness of the cost proposal.

Setting a Timeline

A superintendent search can be structured to meet the time requirements of the local school district regardless of what those may be. Ideally, however, a period of three months to four months from inception to conclusion would provide time to attend to activities important to a thorough process. A typical timeline could be displayed as follows:

First month:

- Decision to seek a new superintendent announced;
- Consultant selected;
- Initial search planning meeting held for board and consultant;
- Tentative timeline established for the search
- Meetings and other methods of seeking input about the superintendent position from community, students, staff are scheduled and held; and
- Publication and distribution of information about the superintendent position (qualifications, personal characteristics, challenges of the job).

Second month:

- Applications accepted;
- Recruitment carried on; and
- Initial screening accomplished.

Third month:

- Application period closes;
- Initial screening completed and reported to the board;
- Selection of semi-finalists;
- Interviews of semi-finalists; and
- Selection of finalists.

Fourth Month:

- In-district finalist interviews and activities;
- District visits (This may occur after selection of finalists or after finalist interviews depending upon the timeline to be observed, the number of finalists, distance, etc.);
- Deliberation on finalists;
- Decision to offer position, announcement of selection;
- Negotiation of contract; and
- Ratification of employment contract.

The time span described above is generous and allows time to carry out the various steps comfortably. It is helpful to have this amount of time if available since it provides ample opportunity for soliciting input from a broad range of constituencies and analyzing it carefully. This timeline would permit, for example, time for in-person meetings, e-mail input, responses to web-site surveys, mail in surveys, call in messages, FAX surveys, etc. Another part of the search process this timeline provides is an application period of at least four to six weeks. If the search occurs early in the year, this can be helpful; a later search would most likely have a significantly shorter period for accepting applications.

There is nothing magic about the timeline or specific order of the activities indicated above. The timing in the year when the search will be conducted, the availability of board members, the schedule of the school year, the size and geographical location of the school system all may be variables in designing a search for a specific situation. There are, for example, alternative ways of gathering input and certainly alternative timing for some of the steps mentioned. It is most important to insure that an honest effort is made to garner input within the time available, that the application period is adequate to meet the need within the time period of the search, that screening is carried out fairly, thoroughly and objectively and that the deliberations upon the candidates are careful and meet legal requirements. It is the job of the consultant and the board of directors to fashion the search for a particular school district with those objectives in mind — the details will vary from district to district.

Involvement of Parents, Citizens, Students and Staff

The position of superintendent of schools is one in which the individual is highly visible and active in the community. The school district is frequently one of the largest employers in the area, the budget one of the largest for local organizations and the impact of the school year upon community and family activities very influential. The selection of this person thus is important to the community as a whole, perhaps much beyond average perception. In terms of the operation and effectiveness of the school district per se, the selection of a new superintendent can be a vital key to educational success for students.

The gatekeeper in the selection process and consummation of that procedure is the board of directors. It is up to the board to plan and implement a process, utilizing the consultant, to yield an accurate reflection of what is desired in a new superintendent. There are many tools for accomplishing this task and some are indicated below. It should be underscored once again that there is certainly no single approach that is superior. The pattern that fits a local district should be designed in terms of the time available, the tools that can be utilized and the perceived expectation of the constituents that the board serves.

The following approaches for gathering input have been utilized by districts in conducting a superintendent search:

- Holding a series of meetings for parents, citizens, staff members and students. The number of meetings would vary depending upon the situation. It is generally wise to provide a uniform method for people to express their suggestions and opinions; e.g. a written form that can be analyzed later. Depending upon the size of the school system, it might be helpful to hold staff meetings in several buildings or work sites.
- Forming an ad hoc committee charged with developing suggestions for qualities, qualifications and challenges pertinent to the position. This group can be constructed to include a cross section of the community. Or, there can be several committees with similar tasks with the input recorded and provided for the board.
- There are several possibilities for surveying the broad range of perspectives with opinions to offer — a newspaper survey, an e-mail survey, a mailing to patrons, a paper survey and/or electronic form to staff and students, polling of randomly selected individuals, open-ended questions to which people can respond by letter/FAX, etc. The possibilities are varied, but it is important to utilize the consultant and other needed expertise to insure that the efforts are implemented well and that results are usable (and used!)

These ideas are certainly not exhaustive and many more could be generated. It is critical to emphasize, however, that an authentic effort to gain input during the search process is important. Part of the reason for doing so, of course, is to respond to the responsibility that public entities have to include the people served.

Another reason is less obvious but has value as well. The process of stimulating discussion, gathering input and giving it an important place in decision-making is a strong stimulus to a positive atmosphere that will surround the final decision. The person selected as superintendent after significant involvement of a community will usually benefit from a sense of positive anticipation, welcome and good will. Certainly these can be positive benefits in the beginning of a new tenure.

Again, the ability of a board of directors to utilize a broad input effort will vary. It is possible to use an approach to respond to a short timeline or other circumstance that will work well. It is the job of the consultant and board of directors to solve the challenge in some way that works for them, but some comprehensive outreach to the community early in the search process is highly recommended.

The community also has an important role to play as the search progresses. This is addressed later.

Describing the Person Sought and the Position

The conventional pattern in portraying the important elements for a superintendent position is to develop descriptions for at least three dimensions:

- The personal qualities or characteristics desired in the new superintendent;
- The qualifications felt important or desirable in a new superintendent; and
- The challenges of the job as the new person assumes responsibility to lead the school district.

Personal Qualities

The process of gathering input from members of a community, staff and student body will produce a large number of descriptors for the personal qualities felt important. The search consultant will assist the board in focusing the list effectively.

A review of the results of the reports of input from several searches will yield a great deal of similarity in terms of these traits. It seems that the people of most communities will have similar feelings about the personal qualities desirable in a superintendent. Experience in surveying a number of superintendent placements and subsequent success indicates that certain of these traits may be particularly important:

- A pattern of dealing with people honestly;
- Skill in communicating clearly and understandably;
- A friendly, approachable manner; good "people skills";
- A sense of humor;
- Enthusiasm;
- Flexibility;
- Willingness to take a calculated risk;
- Confidence;
- Common sense and good judgment;
- Respect and concern for others; and
- Ability to earn trust and extend trust to others.

Individual search processes will of course produce many other descriptors, but these surface as the most common. And, the business community consistently reports that these may be the most fundamental elements that support success in a job. The listing of such qualities in a search brochure or other job description will surprise no one. The fact that they are singled out for emphasis, however, should send a clear message to applicants as well as others that a person should have demonstrated these qualities in their work and personal lives in order to be a viable candidate. As they are incorporated in the materials for the position they serve as useful criteria in screening and evaluating performance in various interview settings.

Qualifications and Experience

The area of qualifications is more definitive in some ways since these reference points are, in most cases, more observable. The following are some useful categories of qualifications to be considered along with those suggested in the input process locally. The indicators in these major categories may be stated in the form of questions:

- **Educational Programs**. Has the applicant been able to lead or help lead a program that shows positive growth in student achievement? Does the person understand and describe the elements necessary to implement educational reform? Is their evidence of a conscious, effective program for staff development in the person's background?
- **Communications, Community Relations**. Is there evidence of success in public/media relations? Has the applicant demonstrated success in speaking with small and larger groups? Have there been successful experiences in working with diverse groups? Has the person had success in facilitating group processes? Are there evidences of good writing skills (e.g. memos, policies, newsletters)?
- **Leadership Skills**. Has the applicant successfully reorganized a staff, implemented new policies, developed new programs for a school district? Have there been successes with developing or supporting good staff morale? Is there evidence of successful change in the school system during the applicant's tenure? Does it appear that other administrators and staff members

have been held appropriately accountable? Do other administrators in the person's school district appear to have grown or benefited during the tenure?

- **Decision Making Skills**. Is there a pattern of ability to come to decisions? Is there evidence of reasonable involvement of others in the decision making process?
- **District Level Administration**. Does the applicant have successful experience in selecting and assessing personnel? Is there evidence that the applicant understands and has skill in collective bargaining? Has there been prudent and responsible fiscal management in the person's experience? Have transportation, maintenance and food service programs received this person's attention and support?

As mentioned in the section on personal qualities, there are certain fundamental traits that contribute to success. There are two specific qualifications that also fall into the category of fundamental and critical — board relationships and budget. Long-term success in the position of superintendent absolutely demands skill in these areas of administration.

Board-Superintendent Relationship

The qualifications for a superintendent position should include some reference to the area of skill in board relationships in the job description and in the screening process. An applicant should have demonstrated the ability to provide leadership with a board, to work cooperatively with a board, to carry out board policy and directives, to provide clear, timely communication for the board, to assist the board in short range and long range planning and to support accountability for both the administration and the board itself. This is an area of universal importance regardless of the size of school system.

There are frequently applicants who may be seeking their first superintendent position. Discovering their capability in the area of board/superintendent relationships is more difficult than with an experienced superintendent. Other kinds of relationships may be indicators (e.g. with committees, administrative teams, parent groups, faculties, etc.). The interview process is particularly important for such an applicant in many ways and especially in the board relationship area.

Budget Leadership

The ability to understand, develop and monitor a budget is another critical capacity that should be mentioned in describing the position and in screening applicants. The size of the school district makes a difference in terms of the personal attention the superintendent will need to give budgetary matters. Nevertheless, the superintendent must understand the budget and have the ability to monitor it accurately. Weakness in this specific area of administration is the most common and harmful cause of problems in school district management.

The District's Challenges

A third major dimension of the school district frequently described for applicants is an assessment of the challenges facing the school district in the near future. A statement that is carefully crafted and based on reasonable assumptions about the current status and future for the district is of great interest to potential applicants. This is another fruitful opportunity for gathering input from community, staff and the board.

The methods described for obtaining such opinions from people could all apply to describing the likely challenges the school district will face. The responses from various individuals and constituencies may be significantly more variable when asking about this topic. Frequently, hot issues from the past will resurface in people's minds, concerns of a "political" nature in the community may be mentioned, resentment toward individual staff members could be reported and various advocacy groups may be adamant that the interest they represent is a major challenge.

The formulation of the challenges after analyzing the input is a sensitive task. It is important to identify a few truly major needs or issues to be faced. It is also important, however, not to exaggerate the seriousness or magnitude of these issues. Mentioning a few challenges that the district will likely encounter gives applicants a flavor of the future. A picture that is overly negative may be a disservice to the school district. If the school district has the time to measure the perceptions of challenges

thoroughly, the effort is of significant value beyond structuring the application process. This can be an important profile of public, staff and even board attitudes about the school system. It can be of great benefit to the successful candidate in a later consideration of the mindset he or she will encounter in the early part of an administration.

Appendix 2 is made up of worksheets to assess personal qualities, qualifications and the district's challenges. The worksheet for *Identifying the Challenges* suggests some typical kinds of challenges with room to rate them as critical, important or not important.

The Recruitment Brochure and Advertising

The various kinds of descriptors about the position (personal qualities, qualifications, challenges of the position) are usually combined with a brief description of the school system and the community into some form of brochure. The instructions for making application, the timeline and contact person(s) are also listed and this publication is then distributed on a wide basis.

The quality and 'slickness' of these brochures vary considerably and a knowledgeable search consultant can provide the board with advice on what might be done and what might be particularly effective for that district. As with other elements of the search, the quality of a brochure will vary depending upon the timing of the search, the ability to produce a publication of quality, cost, etc.

There are many ways to accomplish the distribution of this information and certainly alternatives for the local board to consider. The most important need is to give information to potential applicants that is accurate, that encourages interest and that provides effective guidance in making application. While it is esthetically satisfying to publish an attractive, high quality brochure, the needs may be met with a simple newsletter document with the important information.

Each school district will also need to consider what additional advertising makes sense for its needs in the search. The increased reliance upon technology has generated free or inexpensive web sites that list superintendent openings at the state and national levels. The consultant can assist the board in taking advantage of such services. In addition, more conventional advertising can be obtained through state and national organizations. Advertising in *Education Week* for example is effective in spreading the word about an opening nationally, if somewhat expensive. Notices at regional and national meetings, booths at job information programs, advertising in the popular media are all possibilities. It should be underscored, however, that access to electronic communications has made this task much easier and less expensive. Further advice is available from WSSDA and WASA regarding this aspect of the search.

Defining the Application Process

The actual application process is another decision for the board to make in working with the consultant. The steps that are defined by the board for individuals to follow in making application are of importance. Frequently, the consultant will suggest a pattern for the board to consider adopting or adapting to meet its particular needs. The basic elements of the application process often include the following components.

Application

An application form: virtually all superintendent search processes will utilize some kind of application form. The form typically will provide directions for the applicants to supply the following information:

- Personal information;
- Current job position;
- Job experience related to education;
- Other job experience;
- References;
- Education;
- Community involvement/activities;
- Background check information;
- Other required steps for completing the application process;
- Timeline for the application process; and
- Return address or method for submitting application.

Placement Files

It is typical to include additional elements in the application process beyond completion of the actual application form. The field of educational administration has relied historically upon official college placement files or credentials to provide a summary of personal and professional information along with confidential statements about the individual. It is still general practice to ask that applicants submit such materials if available although they are increasingly only a part of the information felt necessary. There are certain characteristics of the placement files that mitigate their usefulness — the speed with which a college placement office may supply the files varies considerably, with possible delays; the method for obtaining confidential statements from references to be included in the file can be cumbersome and thus the statements become dated. Nevertheless, the files are usually requested.

Cover Letter

Another frequently required component is a letter submitted by the applicant briefly describing his or her background and why the applicant is applying for this specific position. There is no immediate guarantee as to the authenticity of such letters, but a thorough interview process provides ample opportunity for indicators as to how accurately the letter portrayed the applicant and his or her qualities.

Resume

Some processes will also ask that the applicant prepare and include a resume that is accurate, complete and up to date. This provides a useful and reasonably uniform tool for initial screening and evaluating. Asking for such a document separately also insures that a non-traditional applicant has a fair opportunity to display his or her qualifications comparable to others who may have official placement files.

References

Increasingly applicants are invited or asked to submit several letters of reference/recommendation that are current and can speak particularly to qualifications for this specific position. This can be a valuable adjunct to the college placement file and, for the applicant not using a college placement file, offers a chance to provide something comparable to augment the application.

Nondiscrimination

The application process must conform to the regulations governing public employment in avoiding discriminatory practices. The school district will have certain assurances in this regard that must be included in the application materials. A major contribution of the consultant will be to help the school district meet such requirements from the very outset of the search process through to the appointment of a new superintendent.

Confidentiality

It is normal for the application materials submitted to a school district for a superintendent position to be accepted and handled in confidence. This would be the expectation of applicants; if for any reason the district chooses not to follow that pattern, it would be absolutely critical to make that known to potential applicants before they make application.

The Association strongly recommends that these materials be treated confidentially. State law does permit public employers to keep employment applications confidential. The specific statutory provision is in the Public Records Act and it provides: "The following are exempt from public inspection and copying: . . . (t) All applications for public employment, including the names of applicants, resumes, and other related materials submitted with respect to an applicant." RCW 42.17.310 (1).

The application materials should be handled only be staff who are charged with and able to observe confidentiality. If possible, the applications should be received by one person with secure filing space available. Any communications regarding the applicants should be handled carefully so as not to risk a breach of confidentiality.

At the conclusion of the search process, the original application materials should be kept on file by the school district for three years. Again, these should be maintained as confidential files. They should be labeled with a notice that they should be destroyed after three years (with date provided). The application of the person selected as superintendent should be transferred to his or her official personnel file. The confidential materials which accompanied that application, such as a college placement file, should be destroyed.

Initial Screening of the Applicants

The initial screening of applicants is an activity that may occur over time as applications arrive and continuing to completion after the deadline for applications has been reached.

Initial and Informal Background Checks

Another form of assistance provided by the consultant at this stage of the search may be the ability to check with contacts who know the applicants without risking the confidentiality of the person interested in the position. Or, the consultant could make contacts with other consultants who have evaluated this person's background or speak with someone in a professional association who may be knowledgeable about the person's qualifications. Following the closing of the application period, the consultant can make further contacts of references the applicant indicates may be contacted at this stage of the process.

It should be re-emphasized that a knowledgeable consultant can be of great value at this stage. Often, applicants will be reluctant to permit the school district to contact current board members, colleagues, constituents, etc. at this stage since doing so might jeopardize relationships at home. The applicant does not know at this juncture the relative chances of being one of two or three finalists and may feel that risking damage to these sensitive relationships is too great. And yet, the board conducting the search would like some independent indication of this person's competence and reputation. The consultant can help provide this information while observing the applicant's wish for anonymity. Other telephone contacts can also be made which are indicated as permissible.

Screening Process

Beyond the indicators above, the initial screening would of course include a checklist of completeness for each applicant. In most cases, the consultant would devise some method of assessing the relative strength of the applicants by evaluating the quality of their overall application, the degree to which they seem to display the personal qualities of interest, the number of the desired qualifications the person possesses, the match between prior experience and that likely to be most valuable to the school district, the quality of references submitted and those contacted, etc.

The board should receive from the consultant an evaluation of all the applicants with indication as to which seem the strongest for this particular position. The consultant then assists the board members in their assessment and deliberation as to which applicants should be selected for initial interviews.

There are several key decisions that accompany this stage of the search process. There are a myriad of techniques to help with this kind of decision making activity. Perhaps the most important consideration is to keep the focus upon the central criteria identified by the board after gathering input and considering those factors that the board members themselves felt to be critical. These should form the measures against which the applicants are assessed and provide the direction for determining who will come for interviews. The consultant should be able to blend these important criteria into some kind of tool(s) that assists the board's work at this stage.

Possible Semi-Finalist Screening

If the timing of the search permits and the number of applicants from which to select is adequate, it is helpful to select a group of 'semi-finalists' who can be invited for initial interviews. Usually, the number of semi-finalists would fall between four and six.

Advice received for current searches indicates that a school district may keep the identity of semi-finalists confidential. This confidentiality will be a key factor as to whether those invited for semi-finalist interviews will follow through with the process.

Once the semi-finalist interviews have been completed, the names of finalists, that is, those who will be among two or three invited back to the district for final interviews and other activities, will be made public. Those individuals whom the board wishes to invite to be finalists should be given the opportunity ahead

of time to communicate whether they would choose to proceed if invited to do so.

If the timing of the search, the number of the applicants, board preference, or some other factor makes proceeding from initial screening to final interviews preferable, then the identities of those invited for interviews is not protected information. In such a case, the screening process would involve more in-depth contacts following permission from the applicants. The Association suggests that board members themselves conduct at least part of the telephone contacts since experience indicates that candor from other board members is enhanced when talking with a fellow school director. There is information in Appendix 3 (C) that provides tips for telephone interviews.

Initial Interviews

Prior to the initial interviews, the consultant should assist the board in developing questions and other activities that board members might wish to include (such as a written exercise). A typical interview time would be an hour and it is usual for there to be 10 to 15 questions for applicants. There should be time at the end preserved for applicants to summarize and/or ask something of the board. The time set for the interviews should be adhered to. It is helpful to the process for questions to be assigned to board members so that there is consistency in the way they are asked. This also permits those not asking a question to observe more carefully and make notes. There are other suggestions in Appendix 3 to provide possible assistance with interviews.

Following the interviews of semi-finalists, the board must deliberate as to which applicants should be invited back for final interviews and other activities. The board now has the application materials to refer to as well as the performance of the applicants in the interview activities. As with the earlier deliberations in the initial screening, the major criteria identified for the position should provide the fundamental framework for a decision. The notes and reactions of board members to the applicants' performance in the interviews provides another dimension and the degree to which the applicants seem to 'fit' the board's expectations can be more fully explored.

This may be a difficult decision and some board members have found it helpful to wait a day or two before meeting to come to a conclusion. By this time, there will be additional information available from the consultant regarding the semi-finalists. The consultant may be able to assist the board at this point in the process as in the earlier stages by helping provide decision making techniques or tools. It is prudent to identify one or two alternates to the list of selected finalists in case one or two of those invited to come to the district as a finalist decline.

Planning Finalist Interviews and Activities in the District

When the board has arrived at a decision, the consultant and the board should determine a schedule for finalist interviews and activities. The time gap between semi-finalist interviews and the finalist interviews and activities should be as short as possible. It is conceivable, of course, that the schedule as projected at the beginning of the search might have to be slightly different to accommodate that of board members and the actual finalists.

There should be contact with the finalists to invite them to the district for the finalist activities. The board should consider the following points and have agreement on the ones that apply to this stage of the search prior to contacting the candidates. This information can be conveyed to the candidate by phone and by other means as well:

- Dates available for the finalist activities;
- Time and place for arrival;
- General agenda anticipated for the day;
- Request to bring spouse/family/ or whether this is not expected; if family members will be invited, a description of what will be done by way of activities for them (e.g. dinner with the board);
- The district's willingness to pay expenses, how much;
- The materials to be made available to the candidate in advance; e.g. budget, collective bargaining agreements, publications, etc.;
- The board's intended timeline for arriving at a final decision; or
- A contact person or method for communication prior to the finalist day.

The experience for finalists in the school district has evolved into a kind of "marathon" of activities. It is typical for the day to begin by 8:00 a.m. and conclude sometime after 9:00 p.m. in the evening. The superintendent candidates may be involved in meetings with individuals, groups, the board, interview settings, lunch and dinner meetings, etc. While the frenetic pace imposes a burden upon the school district, board members and the candidates themselves, there is merit in this combination of efforts. One of the values of this variety of activity is that people can observe the candidates in several different contexts; this is frequently helpful in gauging how an individual might function in the hectic pace of the superintendent role. This also gives the board members an additional opportunity to assess how they would feel in working with the candidate.

There is normally a formal interview with the board during this day which gives time to follow up on questions generated from the initial interview. The candidate also can learn a great deal during this day since there is exposure to a cross section of staff members, citizens, students, board members, the media, etc.

Community Feedback

The board gains major insights during this day from the perceptions of individuals and groups who meet the candidate. It is wise to design some method of feedback to the board which is uniform and easily analyzed so that board members can quickly profit from the perceptions of others regarding the candidates. A simple written feedback form can be utilized in each setting and collected for the board's perusal.

It will be tempting for people to want to indicate their 'top choice.' It is advisable to structure the feedback form and to counsel them to report relative strengths. It is unrealistic to expect that people will not have favorites, but in general it is best to try to avoid the popularity contest syndrome so the board's decision is as unfettered by interest group expectations as possible. The flavor of people's perceptions, however, should be of great interest to the board. It may be a helpful factor in an otherwise very close deliberation.

The size of the school district, the timing of the search, the availability of staff and other factors certainly play a part in determining how to structure a day for finalists in the district. It would be impractical to try to carry out a tour

of schools in a large district for example. In such a case, a virtual or sample tour might substitute. The same is true of the community. The school district should also expect that finalists would gain familiarity with the district and community on an independent basis, given the importance of the job for them personally. The Association suggests the schedule below as a sample to consider when making plans in a local school district:

Morning

The finalist reports to the school district office and is welcomed by at least one board member, the incumbent superintendent if possible and appropriate and/or other administrators. The agenda for the day is reviewed and some time allowed to discuss what will occur. It is assumed that the finalist would have been given some prior notice of what to expect.

Frequently some tour is provided to help the candidate become oriented. Since the school district office is the working home for the superintendent, it is wise to provide an introduction to the staff and the facility itself. A tour of schools, maintenance, transportation and food service facilities is certainly helpful if practical in terms of the schedule.

One of the guiding principles for organizing this day should be to provide representative contact with all elements of the staff — teachers, administrative and supervisory staff, office staff, custodians, maintenance employees, food service employees, transportation employees, etc. In most cases, this will involve meeting with representatives of these employee groups, but it is important to send a message to both the candidate and staff that the district recognizes and values all of those who contribute to helping students learn.

A meeting with the central administrators/supervisors is normally very helpful. These staff members are crucial to the school district's success and their perceptions of the candidate are very important. And, the candidate would find this opportunity of great interest since these people form the closest part of the superintendent's partnership with the staff.

It is also wise to provide a meeting with principals since it is unlikely that touring buildings will provide a meaningful chance to form accurate impressions. The principals are another critical element in the work of the superintendent; their impressions are important to the district and board and the candidate will welcome the chance for a meeting as well.

It is common to combine lunch with some other objective for the day — perhaps a meeting with the incumbent superintendent, business leaders, community officials, etc.

Afternoon and Evening

If there is time in the schedule and it is considered of enough importance, the candidate can be given time to peruse a variety of documents that can contribute to a more complete understanding of the district. Board minutes, policies, organization charts, job descriptions, collective bargaining history, fiscal information, etc. all may be of interest. If the schedule is too full to allow this kind of activity, it may be possible to provide summary information or direct the candidate to electronic files that could be examined.

One of the major decisions the board must make is whether some representative group will be offered the opportunity to 'interview' the finalists. This is frequently requested by people in the community and is a delicate issue to decide upon. The positive aspects of providing this opportunity include reinforcing to the community that the board welcomes involvement. Another positive element is that the feedback from the interview can be truly helpful to the board's deliberations. A potential question is that the board is the legal entity charged with the selection/employment of the superintendent. There should be no abrogation of that authority either real or perceived. If the board chooses to provide this additional interview setting, there should be orientation for the participants, a clear statement of their role of providing feedback and not a decision, and a simple, uniform way to gain the feedback of the group regarding the finalists.

It is also helpful to provide a chance for representatives of the various unions to meet with the finalists. This can be done in a group setting in order to expedite the schedule for the day.

A meeting with community/business leaders, public officials might be considered if there is

not ample opportunity for involvement in the other parts of the schedule.

Parent leaders from the PTA, PTO, Booster Club, Foundation, etc. might also form a group with interest in being involved.

There should be a structured interview with the board as well that provides for asking different questions from the initial interviews if they were conducted, for follow up questions and for more questions from the candidate. The style of boards and consultants vary significantly at this stage. If there is not another scheduled point for a general discussion of the range of salary, benefits and length of contract, it would be appropriate to include it here.

It is common for the board to have dinner with the candidate and spouse. This provides a more relaxed setting than other meetings and the opportunity for the various people to get a chance to know each other informally.

The final activity for the day is frequently some kind of 'community forum' at which the candidate is introduced to a group of citizens. Usually this has been a well publicized meeting with an open invitation to attend. Some districts have found it helpful to provide special encouragement to attend to key people to ensure a reasonable turnout. It is appreciated by those attending if there is some mechanism for providing feedback to the board about their impressions. This can be done through a written form, turned in at the end of the meeting or by various other devices including use of technology in various forms. The arrangements that make sense are associated with the size of the school system, timing, facilities and other factors.

Finally, some boards choose to set aside one day for each finalist, others have several finalists cycling through each phase of the day's activities at different points, so that the work can be accomplished more quickly. There is no right or wrong answer, the choice depends on the circumstances in that specific district.

Gathering and Evaluating Information about Finalists

The activity of gathering information about the finalists occurs throughout the search process. The application materials themselves provide a foundation upon which to build, telephone and personal contacts with references or other informed individuals make a contribution, independent contacts between the consultant and the applicants may yield information, the interview process and finalist activities will produce further data, visitations to the district/community of the finalists also provide help. Some of these resources should be sought in a structured fashion to assist in reliability. A few points are listed below with supplemental information available in Appendix 3:

- The assessment of the application materials should, as mentioned earlier in this document, be carried out with an analytical and systematic approach that produces a comprehensive summary for the board that treats each candidate fairly.
- Telephone contacts should be undertaken in a careful, uniform way with notes or a report of the results for the consultant and board to utilize.
- Interviews should be planned so that questions are selected with care, there is a set pattern for questioning, there is provision for taking notes and that spontaneous or follow-up questions are presented appropriately.
- There are a number of legal constraints that bear upon interviews of job applicants. These are summarized in part in Appendix 3. Board members should be provided with orientation to interviewing protocols. If the board has provided opportunity for other groups to conduct a structured 'interview' of candidates, then orientation to these interviewing guidelines should be provided for individuals involved in that process as well.
- Visitations by board members to the home districts or communities of finalists are important to help with a final selection. The candidate should assist with the general organization of the visit, but there should be opportunity to reach out to people not suggested by the candidate as well. Community officials, business persons, staff members, students, all may be possible ad hoc references during the visitation. As with other parts of the search, the information should be gathered in a simple, uniform way to share with other board members. Typically, the visitations are carried out by individual board members or two board members working as a team. Sample questions for these visitations are included in Appendix 3.

Deliberating Upon a Final Choice

The board will come to the end of the interviews, visitations, reference checks, etc. with a significant amount of information. The process of deliberating upon the finalists is very important, but also somewhat cumbersome. The current status of law in Washington imposes certain requirements upon the final steps of the selection process.

The board should schedule a meeting with an announced executive session to deliberate about the qualifications of the finalists. This is frequently a session with an unpredictable time length; it should be estimated and then corrected during the process as required by law. The board may use many ways of evaluating the qualifications of the finalists and may be assisted by the consultant in the work. The board is expected to deliberate fully as to the finalists and to come to a point of readiness to make a final decision in open session to offer the position. The board should refrain from coming to that selection until back in regular open session. Thus, it is advisable to avoid polling the board or asking for a 'straw vote' prior to going back into regular session. It is, of course, advisable to ask for the readiness of each individual to come to a vote on the final selection.

In most cases, if board members have already indicated readiness to make a decision, it is likely that there will emerge a natural consensus once the board is in regular session. Should there be hesitancy, the board should be careful to limit the discussion to non-confidential information and avoid polarization of the board if possible. If the board is ready to vote then the chair/president should proceed. If not, it would be possible to go back into executive session following appropriate legal notice to try to satisfy any need for further discussion of finalists. A candidate will feel best if the decision to offer the position is unanimous.

Negotiating a Contract

Once the board has taken official action to offer the superintendent position to a given individual, the task of negotiating a contract must be addressed. There are a number of factors to bear in mind when contemplating the contractual arrangement. The discussion below refers to many of the considerations involved; as with several other topics addressed in this document earlier, it is advisable to have a superintendent contract reviewed for compliance with law.

Negotiations

A board frequently will welcome assistance in the process of negotiating a contract with the selected candidate. One of the most direct steps is to ask advice from executive staff of WSSDA or WASA in proceeding with this task. Both of these organizations are familiar with the process and can offer valuable insight.

A 'model contract' has been developed through the mutual efforts of staff from each organization and is included for information in Appendix 5. This model document has been the foundation for many superintendent contracts in the state. It is under constant review and, for that reason, it is important to check as to whether the version under consideration is completely up to date. The staff of WSSDA and WASA offer this model as an example of how the contract can be constructed. It has been developed with the conviction that it should be fair to both the school district and the superintendent.

Another avenue open to a board is to employ an attorney to negotiate the contract on behalf of the school district. This is of course a possibility and provides instant legal review as the process is carried out. In any event, the board should seek final legal review before any negotiated contract is approved.

Boards may also feel it is desirable for the consultant to assume the role of negotiator of the contract. This is another option to be considered; some consultants feel comfortable in providing this assistance, others may not. The consultant has up to this point been acting as an agent of the board. That mantle would be carried into the negotiation of a contract which would also be true of an attorney representing the school district. The selected candidate may wish to involve a staff member of WASA to help review a proposed contract to gain the advantage of statewide perspective on the offer.

Beyond the players involved in the negotiation process, there are significant specific considerations that should be taken into account when approaching a contract. It should be pointed out at this juncture, that the contract between a school board and a superintendent is a public document and is not protected from disclosure. Obviously, both parties should feel that it is supportable in the public arena should the topic be raised by a citizen, the media or staff.

Duration

The duration of the contract is usually the first element to be considered. Under Washington law, the contract may be for one, two or three years (RCW 28A.400.010). The contract should specify the length and, if it is for two or three years, when an annual decision would be made to add a year to the contract term or let it run to the expiration date. It is in the best interest of both parties if the decision is set for a mid-point in the year; e.g. February 1. This gives time for any further deliberations that might be desirable.

Some districts have utilized language that provides an automatic extension of a year if the board does not take affirmative action of some other kind by a certain date. In such a case, if the extension date in a contract were set at February 1 and that date passed without any board action, then the contract would automatically be extended or "rolled over". While such a practice is permissible under law, it creates the potential for an awkward situation. It is possible that the busy pace of a school year could result in the February 1 date going by without notice. Upon realizing this, a board may feel resentful that the opportunity for discussion was missed. Moreover, a superintendent who owes the extension of a contract to a missed deadline may seem to be in a less supported position than if a conscious decision were made by the board. Such "roll-over" clauses do little to encourage regular, ongoing

and thoughtful evaluation of the superintendent; can undermine the professional relationship and trust between the board and the superintendent; and, at best, provide only a legalistic advantage to the superintendent.

Work Days

The next item to address is the number of work days to comprise the work year. The conventional approach is to state that 260 days shall constitute the work year minus paid holidays and vacation days. This description fits the definition acceptable to the retirement system governing superintendents. The passage of the "retire/rehire" legislation, however, creates another alternative should the board reemploy a person retired from public employment to serve as superintendent. In this latter case, the work year would be restricted to the number agreed upon by the school board and superintendent, not to exceed the limit indicated in the law (1,500 hours), assuming the superintendent wishes to collect full retirement benefits.

Salary

The amount of salary the board agrees to pay is of course a major factor in the contract. The salaries of superintendents across the state vary tremendously in amount. The salaries for smaller districts tend to be considerably lower than those for larger systems, as would be expected. Even with that kind of variation, however, the salary for the superintendent may be one of the highest in a given community.

The amount of salaries is influenced by a number of things including the market place, experience, size of district, etc. Perhaps the most compelling support for substantial salaries for superintendents is directly related to the nature of the position. A school district, in virtually all situations, is a very complex organization with fiscal, human and logistical challenges as formidable as the largest business or agency. In the majority of communities, the school system is one of the largest employers with one of the largest budgets. The responsibilities borne by its superintendent include the welfare of students, staff and the patrons who use the school district. Over time, the public has supported increases to these salaries to recognize the expertise and commitment required to serve in the job successfully.

The board can find guidance for offering a salary from those offered superintendents in similar districts, by that offered the former superintendent, by the fiscal capacity of the budget and by the board's perception of community values. The salary survey performed annually by School Information Research Service (SIRS) can provide valuable perspective. Contact may be made with WSSDA or WASA for assistance in finding such information.

Termination

The contract should include a statement regarding the right of the school district to discharge a superintendent for 'cause'; i.e. for failure to fulfill the conditions of the contract or other reason that supports legal termination. The right to consider such action when justified should be stated as the prerogative of the school district. The superintendent has access to all of the protections available under the laws governing such an action.

Management

The superintendent is responsible for successful administration of the school district and the contract should clearly recognize the right of the superintendent to organize, reorganize and arrange the administrative/supervisory staff at his or her discretion. The responsibility for selection, placement and transfer of personnel as functions of the superintendent should also be acknowledged. All of these actions would be subject to approval by the board, but this clause in the contract clarifies the board's recognition and support of the superintendent's right to manage.

Communication

It is important to the success of board/superintendent relations that communication be open and the channels recognized. It is recommended that the contract obligate board members individually and collectively to refer criticism, complaints and suggestions brought their attention promptly to the superintendent. This gives the superintendent the opportunity to address issues and also lays the basis for the superintendent's accountability for doing so.

External Work

A superintendent may be invited to provide consultative work, professional development presentations, lectures, writing, etc. outside the school district. The contract should specify what conditions will prevail should such an invitation be received. In most instances, the superintendent would be expected to use vacation days for paid services provided outside the district. Opportunities that do not provide compensation are usually considered professional development activities.

Professional Development

The contract should provide encouragement for the superintendent to continue professional improvement through various learning experiences such as professional meetings and conferences. The financial support of the district for such activities should be indicated or referenced to board policy.

A superintendent is usually expected to be active in professional and civic organizations. It is common practice for the contract to specify that the school district will pay annual dues in the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) and one specified civic organization (e.g. Rotary Club.)

Sick Leave

The contract should state that the superintendent will be provided twelve days of paid sick leave each year to be used pursuant to district policy. State law provides that unused sick leave shall accumulate from year to year to the legal limit, 180 days. If the school district has authorized sick leave buy back, then this should be referenced in the superintendent's contract.

Vacation

Vacation should also be referenced in the contract with the number of days specified. The number of vacation days generally falls between 23 and 25 days. It is common that the contract will require that advance, written notice of the intent to take vacation be provided the chair or president of the board. It is also standard for the district to permit the superintendent to accumulate up to 30 days of vacation and to guarantee that up to 30 days would be compensated at the time of termination. Plan 1 of the teachers retirement system permits the application of up to 30 days of compensated vacation to the total salary recognized for retirement credit.

It is important to specify in the contract the per diem rate of the superintendent since it is needed to calculate the daily value of any sick leave buy back and vacation pay. The per diem rate is calculated by subtracting the annual vacation days and the district recognized holidays from 260 and dividing the resulting figure into the gross annual salary for the superintendent.

It is also possible to permit in the contract the "cash out" of a certain number of unused vacation days each year if the superintendent finds that not all vacation is used.

Benefits

The benefits provided for the superintendent are perhaps the most variable aspect of contracts across the state. In terms of medical/dental benefits, the school district is permitted to provide the superintendent the same amount toward coverage given other employees or full cost of coverage if the board so chooses. The board may add life insurance, disability insurance and other kinds of benefits as well. This is one of the dimensions of the contractual arrangement which can be structured to make the position attractive to potential or selected candidates.

A different benefit is connected to how or whether the school district will provide compensation for travel costs associated with the superintendent position. It is permissible for the school district to allow the superintendent to have a district vehicle 24 hours of the day and to support all of the costs associated with it, although there may be income tax consequences for the superintendent. The use of the vehicle is restricted to official district business and it must be clearly marked as district property. This has become somewhat less frequent in recent years with more districts deciding to provide other forms of support for travel. It is certainly permissible for the district to pay the recognized IRS rate for mileage reimbursement to the superintendent for use of a personal vehicle on district business. The cost of fuel and other vehicle costs have reduced

this alternative somewhat as well although it is certainly in widespread use. Numerous districts provide the superintendent with a fixed monthly or annual stipend to compensate for travel costs incurred by the superintendent. These stipends range considerably from perhaps $200 a month to $1,000 or more per month. None of the forms of travel support mentioned above are considered "compensation" by the retirement system and thus do not count toward earned salary credit for retirement. Another approach is simply for the total salary to be set at a figure that both parties agree is adequate to obviate the need for any travel stipend or separate form of compensation.

Physicals

It is considered sound practice for the school district to require that the superintendent receive regular medical examinations that result in the board being assured of the superintendent's general fitness to perform the job. Usually the school district agrees in the contract to pay for the cost of an annual examination if not covered by the superintendent's insurance and then to receive a statement from the physician regarding medical fitness. The statement received is to be treated as confidential information.

Residency and Moving Expenses

Most school boards require that the superintendent reside in the school district by a certain date following initial employment. It is increasingly common for the school district to agree to pay an amount toward moving expenses, the maximum level to be indicated in the contract. Given the market in locating qualified superintendents, this can be an attractive contractual feature.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the superintendent is a major element of the board/superintendent relationship. The general nature of the evaluation requirements should be spelled out in the contract. It is important for both the board and the superintendent to have firm dates in place for evaluation and for one of the evaluation meetings to occur mid-year to allow time for adjustments desired by the board. Another component should be annual goals/objectives that are discussed with the board and referenced in the evaluation process. This portion of the contract should be coordinated with the provision regarding the decision date for contract extension as well. The possibility for taking action to increase the annual salary should be specified with a time certain noted (e.g. June 1).

Disability Provision

A provision that provides protection for the school district and the superintendent is one defining the process to be followed in case the superintendent becomes disabled. It is helpful if there is language that defines some of the basic considerations to be made and how they would be determined.

Legal Protections

The superintendent will function in a role of public visibility and vulnerability. The contract should include 'hold harmless' language which assures the superintendent that the district will defend, hold harmless and indemnify the superintendent (and family) from legal actions while acting in good faith within the normal scope of the job.

Language should be included acknowledging that if any part of the contract is found contrary to law, the remainder will remain in effect (savings clause).

There may be additional provisions or benefits that the district or superintendent wish to discuss in developing the contract. It is particularly advisable to seek counsel for any provisions that depart from the customary areas included in the superintendent contract.

Final Board Action to Ratify a Contract

The board must take final action in public session to ratify or accept the contract with the new superintendent. It is absolutely required by state law that the new superintendent be free of other public employment contractual obligations. If the person is leaving another public employer to take the position, the contract should have ended or there must be a release from that contract before the new district can contract with him or her.

The action to ratify the contract is subsequent to the initial action to offer the position to the finalist of choice referred to above. As indicated earlier, the sequence should be observed in order to comply with the current status of state law regarding selection and appointment of public officials. A district will need information beyond the text of the law, however, to insure that it is cognizant of all requirements. This is a topic on which legal counsel should be sought either through already published opinions or direct assistance from a school attorney.

A board is also required by law to see that the new superintendent is administered an oath of office. The administration of the oath can be done by virtually any official; WSSDA, WASA or an Educational Service District (ESD) can provide advice on this requirement. It is no longer a requirement that the superintendent be bonded

Appendices

Appendix 1 (A)

Sample Request for Proposal for Consultant Services — A. Abbreviated Form

The _____ School District invites proposals to provide consultant assistance to the Board of Directors in carrying out a superintendent search.

The Board plans to complete this process by approximately _____ (date).

Proposals are sought from individuals, partnerships or firms that have experience in educational administrator search and selection. The following elements must be included in a proposal in order to receive consideration by the Board of Directors:

1. A suggested outline of activities for assisting the Board in the search/selection.
2. An explanation of the degree of involvement for the Board of Directors, the school district staff and the consultant(s).
3. A description of the recommended degree/kind of community participation and an explanation of how this might occur.
4. A discussion of the record of the individual's, partner's or firm's experience in providing superintendent search/selection services.
5. A list of current references with names, addresses and phone numbers.
6. A recommended timeline for carrying out the search/selection.
7. A precise quotation of cost for assisting the Board of Directors in the search/selection.

The _____ School District observes federal, state and local laws and regulations in regard to equity and equal opportunity.

Completed proposals should be directed to:

(Name)
Superintendent's Office
_____ School District
(address)

Proposals must be received in the Superintendent's Office by (date) _____ at 5:00 p.m. in order to receive consideration. Questions may be directed to _____ at (area code-number), e-mail, web site, etc.

Appendix 1 (B)

Sample Request for Proposal for Consultant Services — B. Detailed Form

Request for Proposal for Consultant Services to Assist in Superintendent Search

1. **GENERAL**

   The Board of Directors of _____ School District requests proposals for professional services to assist the Board in conducting a superintendent search.

   The current superintendent will complete work on _____ . The Board intends to conduct a thorough search. The goal is to have a new, permanent superintendent selected no later than _____ and for that person's employment to begin no later than _____.

2. **EXPECTATIONS OF CONSULTANT**

   - ❑ To develop and conduct a thoughtful, timely process for gathering Board, staff, parent and community input for establishment criteria for the selection process.
   - ❑ To conduct a thorough search for appropriate applicants and ultimately produce for the Board a 'pool' of highly qualified people who meet the criteria established.
   - ❑ To complete other tasks necessary that result in selection and employment of a new superintendent.

3. **PROPOSAL SPECIFICATIONS**

   Proposals should include the following:

   - ❑ Suggested timeline of activities and major events in the search process.
   - ❑ Responsibilities to be assumed by the Board of Directors and the Search Consultant during each phase of the process.
   - ❑ Recommended process for developing criteria that will be used for selecting the new superintendent.
   - ❑ Recommended process for obtaining staff input.
   - ❑ Recommended process for obtaining parent and community input.
   - ❑ Description of the process the consultant suggests for advertising, recruitment including measures to assure equal opportunity and other considerations.
   - ❑ Recommended process for screening, reference checks, interviews and final selection.
   - ❑ Information about the consultant or firm making this proposal including:
     a. Identification of the person who will take primary responsibility for the search with a resume. Names of board members from other districts who can be contacted about working with this person.
     b. Description of other superintendent searches conducted in the past five years for districts of similar or larger size.
     c. Statement as to whether the individual or firm are currently engaged in other projects that are coincident with or might affect the timeline of this search.
     d. The shortest and longest tenure of superintendents appointed in other searches.
     e. Fees for this search, separating out anticipated expenses for each element of the search and outlining other anticipated expenses for the district.

4. **SUBMISSION OF THE PROPOSAL**
Proposals should be sent to:

_____

Proposals must be received by 5:00 p.m. on _____. They may be FAXed to Superintendent Search, _____. Questions regarding the proposal should be addressed to _____.

5. **SELECTION OF THE CONSULTANT**
Proposals will be screened to _____ finalists. The Board of Directors will invite the finalists to make an oral presentation during the week of _____. Only proposals received by the deadline will be considered. All respondents will receive written notification of the decision.

Appendix 2 (A)

Sample Worksheet on Assessing a Leadership Profile — Qualifications

The worksheet below may help in suggesting the kinds of skills and abilities typically felt desirable in a superintendent. This form or something similar could also provide a tool for helping differentiate between a variety of suggested traits.

1. Communications/Community Relations

a. Has been successfully involved in public and press relations.
b. Has excellent speaking skills with large and small groups; articulate.
c. Has experience in bringing diverse special interest groups together.
d. Has skill in facilitating group activities.
e. Has successful experience or training in conflict resolution.
f. Has successfully demonstrated experience dealing with parents and staff "one on one" — a good listener.
g. Positively influences and involves community groups in selected school issues and activities.
h. Possesses excellent writing skills (memos, policies, newsletters, etc.)

6. Leadership Skills

a. Has experience evaluating and reorganizing staff, revising procedures, and implementing policy changes to improve efficiency.
b. Has experience motivating staff and students, bolstering morale and generating enthusiasm.
c. Has motivated others to assume leadership roles.
d. Has successfully effected change in spite of some reluctance on the part of staff.
e. Has used innovative means or has ideas of ways to solve problems without new resources — creative.
f. Successfully delegates authority and responsibility and holds staff accountable.
g. Uses effective ways to regain authority or control where management has lost influence.

7. Decision-Making Skills

a. Can "live with" decisions regardless of how difficult they were to make.
b. Can describe decisions in which the board should participate — provides evidence of a decision-making style that places emphasis on board involvement.
c. Can integrate research data into the decision-making (policy) process.
d. Has established a strong and effective management team -- coordinates decision making with other administrators.
e. Has successfully involved staff and community in decision making. Uses participatory decision-making processes where appropriate.
f. Recognizes situations that call for independent judgment and quick thinking and reacts positively.

8. Board-Superintendent Relations

a. Can motivate the board to maintain its leadership role as the body responsible for education in the community.
b. Can outline a program of board-district goal setting and long range planning.
c. Demonstrates willingness to assume the lead in decision making while keeping the board informed.
d. Discriminates successfully between board policy and administrative procedure.
e. Provides options and recommendations for the board and accepts board directives and implements them.
f. Uses a variety of ways to keep the board informed — can outline a program for board development.
g. Works effectively with the board chairman between meetings. Has a willingness to coordinate decisions with chairman.

9. **Operations, Support Services and Facilities**
   a. Has efficiently managed the operation of a school facility.
   b. Has managed an effective program for supervision of buildings and grounds maintenance.
   c. Knows how to organize and operate an effective, efficient transportation program.
   d. Knows how to organize and operate an effective, efficient, break-even food services program.
   e. Knows how to plan for energy conservation, asbestos removal and other facility programs.
   f. Knows procedures for assessing and improving district operations in all support service areas.
   g. Knows the steps involved in planning new or remodeled facilities and/or dealing with school construction.
   h. Supports cooperative inter-district programs for support services.

10. **Personnel Management**
   a. Can coordinate contract negotiations and administer the bargaining agreements.
   b. Has demonstrated skill in supervising employees at all levels.
   c. Has developed a program for staff evaluation and corrective action.
   d. Has experience developing and coordinating staff professional development programs.
   e. Has experience handling grievances.
   f. Has used a process for recruiting and selecting effective staff.
   g. Knows the components of effective personnel policies, procedures and practices.
   h. Knowledgeable about non-discrimination regulations at the state and federal level.

11. **Budget and Finance**
   a. Can describe how to supervise purchasing, payroll and other fiscal matters.
   b. Can describe ways to restore financial stability to a district with financial problems.
   c. Can explain how to develop and implement budge ıg and accounting control procedures.
   d. Can explain how to establish recommendations for appropriate levy or bond issues.
   e. Can forecast revenue shortfalls and enrollment changes.
   f. Can review a budget printout and note irregularities and areas of potential future concern.
   g. Can speak knowledgeably on general aspects of school district budgeting and knows where to go for advice and assistance.

12. **Educational Programs**
   a. Is familiar with and/or has successful experience with education reform requirements in another district.
   b. Can describe a process for developing curriculum that is consistent with reform requirements, local requirements and that will genuinely meet student needs.
   c. Can describe the role of assessment on local, state and national levels.
   d. Has experience in a building or district where student achievement has been increasing and can describe the role that the superintendent must play in that process.

Appendix 2 (B)

Sample Worksheet on Assessing a Leadership Profile — Personal Qualities

The following qualities have been identified in various contexts including superintendent searches. They are in the minds of many people associated with successful superintendents. The list is arranged in alphabetical order and of course is arbitrary; a local district may add or delete items as the local situation indicates.

- Confident: Demonstrates confidence in his or her abilities, but is open to the thoughts and ideas of others. Instills confidence in the public, staff and students.
- Cooperative: Works well with people who represent opposing views — is tolerant. Mediates disputes to reasonable solution.
- Courageous: Willing to take a stand, make a decision that is unpopular, take a risk if necessary.
- Decisive: Takes a stand when necessary — uses a decision-making process that is thorough and open to input.
- Enthusiastic and Persistent: Shows interest and enthusiasm in work and people. Has a record of a high level of energy. Demonstrates initiative and persistence in spite of setbacks.
- Ethical: Exemplifies the highest moral, ethical and professional behavior.
- Flexible: Adjusts to new situations and responds effectively to sudden changes in conditions.
- Honest: Is consistently tactful, straightforward and honest even under difficult circumstances.
- Humor: Uses humor effectively, can laugh at himself or herself, can see humor in life.
- Innovative: Finds creative ways to resolve difficult problems and is aware of new developments in the field of education.
- Insightful: Is alert and sensitive to issues and concerns before they become major problems. Sees the "big picture" while understanding the details. Anticipates future developments and the outcomes of decisions.
- Judgment: Displays good judgment: Uses common sense and good judgment. Offers wise and thoughtful advice.
- Knowledgeable: Understands school district management as well as educational programs. Reads widely and keeps up with current events. Knowledgeable about state and federal laws pertaining to education.
- Leadership: Creates a feeling of unity and enthusiasm in the district. Decisions and ideas are respected — encourages people to want to do their best. Has an administrative style based on positive human relations, is easy to converse with and is visibly accessible to staff and citizens.
- Motivated: Takes initiative and has the capability and desire to carry projects through to completion.
- Open: Accepts criticism and new ideas without defensiveness.
- Respectful: Demonstrates consideration for and sincerity toward all district patrons, students, staff and board members.
- Responsible: Follows through on commitments, accepts responsibility for successes and failures — doesn't blame others.
- Responsive: Takes action without undue delay, follows through on questions, calls, requests, problems.
- Steady: Thinks quickly, soundly under stress.
- Supportive: Endorses and openly supports policies, procedures and philosophy of the board, supports staff and students. Actively supports community activities and functions; is seen as a community/educational leader.
- Trustworthy: Deals fairly with people and creates feelings of trust and belief. Establishes respect for the school district, supports human development.

Appendix 2 (C)

Identifying the Challenges

This worksheet or something like it could be used with individuals and groups in gathering information as to what challenges are seen for the school district. The data, once gathered, could be analyzed by the board along with other perspectives to create a picture of some issues for the future.

Please rate the following topics in terms of how critical you think them to be in the school district.

	Critical	Important	Unimportant
1. Facilities	❒	❒	❒
2. Enrollment Issues (Choice, Running Start Declining Enrollment)	❒	❒	❒
3. District-Community Relations	❒	❒	❒
4. Curriculum/Instructional Materials	❒	❒	❒
5. Levy and/or Bond Issues	❒	❒	❒
6. Drug and Alcohol Abuse	❒	❒	❒
7. Collective Bargaining	❒	❒	❒
8. Student Achievement	❒	❒	❒
9. Assessment of Student Learning, Testing	❒	❒	❒
10. Support Services (Transportation, Food Services, Maintenance)	❒	❒	❒
11. Class Size	❒	❒	❒
12. Superintendent/Community Relations	❒	❒	❒
13. Budget/Finances	❒	❒	❒
14. District Goals/Strategic Planning	❒	❒	❒
15. Education Reform	❒	❒	❒
16. Efficiency of Operations	❒	❒	❒
17. Co-curricular Activities, Athletics	❒	❒	❒
18. Special Interest Groups	❒	❒	❒
19. At-Risk Students	❒	❒	❒
20. Student Violence/Safety	❒	❒	❒
21. Special Education	❒	❒	❒
22. Site-based Decision Making	❒	❒	❒
23. _____	❒	❒	❒
24. _____	❒	❒	❒

Additional comments or elaboration on items marked "Critical" may be added on the reverse side of this form.

THANK YOU

Appendix 3

Interviewing Tips

The following tips may be helpful to board members in the interview process.

- Think about what you most need to know and what the answers to each question will reveal. Do not spend time probing for answers that are not important.
- Usually, the best questions are open-ended, requiring a thoughtful and detailed response. It is helpful to avoid framing the questions in a way that signals the preferred answers, values, etc.
- Allow candidates the opportunity to raise questions based on board questions. This creates a conversational atmosphere which is much less sterile than a "question/answer" format. Candidates should be given leeway to raise questions that are important to them.
- Allow each board member enough time to ask a follow up question if a response seems unclear or incomplete.
- Although the planned questions are important, the art of listening has an important role as well. Attentive listening will help candidates feel their thoughts have been truly communicated.
- Interview questions tend to prompt a response from the "I" perspective. Try to see if the candidate truly involves others in his or her style of work.
- Ask candidates to elaborate on answers and demonstrate their experiences. (What did that involve? How many people assisted you? What responsibilities did you carry out on a weekly/monthly basis?)
- Decide who will ask each question and use the same format throughout. Let the candidates know how many questions there are and the time allotted for the interview. Be sure to ask all of the identified questions of each candidate unless a candidate fails to use the interview time wisely.
- Questions should be straight forward and asked the same way of each candidate. Those giving the questions should do so in a neutral way and respond without obvious judgment about the responses.
- Allow some silence to ensue following a candidate's initial response to help stimulate further thought and information.

Appendix 3 (A)

Things to Watch for During Interviews

The overall perspective for judging the responses of candidates should be directly related to the major criteria for the position as decided upon by the board at the inception of the search. These should be applied as equally to the candidates as possible. There are some factors to be aware of in the interview that are of some special help:

1. Does the candidate answer the questions or reword the questions and answer something else?
2. Does the candidate talk a question to death? Does the candidate give too many examples or draw so many variables into the situation that no real answer was given?
3. Does the candidate display a sense of humor and humility? Does the candidate seem to be knowledgeable without appearing to be a 'know it all'?
4. Does the candidate deal realistically with questions? Does the candidate know enough about your school district and community's power groups to answer from an informed perspective?
5. Does the candidate seem more liberal or conservative than what might be typical for the community?
6. Does the candidate listen and watch for board cues before answering?
7. How does the candidate sell, or not sell, himself or herself to you?
8. Does the candidate really answer the questions well or is personality the most persuasive characteristic of the candidate's performance?
9. When provided an opportunity to ask questions, are the candidate's questions reasonable and helpful or superficial?
10. Do the candidate's questions and answers reflect a serious amount of preparation and study of the position, district and community?
11. Do board members feel that the interview has accurately portrayed this candidate's answers, personality and administrative leadership? Does the candidate fit the board's perception of the kind of leader who is needed?
12. If the candidate has not yet been a superintendent, do responses seem practical to the actual district setting and not too theoretical?
13. Do the candidate's responses reveal an interest in students and if so how? Is there a sense of honest, strong commitment to public education?

Appendix 3 (B)

Questions You May Be Asked by the Applicants

At the end of an interview, it is customary to invite the candidate to ask questions of the board. It is usually helpful if all board members feel free to respond or participate in the answers. In many respects, the candidate is also interviewing the board. The questions below are illustrative of those that may occur:

1. Are there any issues below the surface that I should know about?
2. Are there serious personnel problems? Staff members on probation? If so, what is the status?
3. What does the board do in terms of professional development for board members and as a unit?
4. What is the pattern for board voting on significant issues? (5-0, 4-1, 3-2) Is this a consistent pattern with the same alignment?
5. How involved is the community in support of school and district activities?
6. What is the tenure of the current board members and are there plans to run again?
7. How many and what kind of grievances have occurred in the past three years?
8. If I were selected as superintendent, how would you help me become familiar with and involved in the district and the community?
9. Using the standard grading system of A, B, C, D, F, how would you rate each school and the district as a whole?
10. Using the same grading system, how would you rate the effectiveness of this board?
11. How would you grade the district office?
12. What are the top two or three priorities for the board members?
13. Why are you on the board?
14. What do you like most about being a board member? What do you like least?
15. Please describe the ideal superintendent for this school district?
16. Please define board micro-management and to what degree it is evident in the school district?
17. When do an individual board members activities become intrusive in the school district?

Appendix 3 (C)

Tips on Telephone Reference Checks

Frequently the board members as well as the consultant are involved in performing telephone reference checks. Normally, this occurs only in the final stages of the search when finalists have been identified. While the calls may be made to a variety of people, experience has demonstrated that board members and others in a finalist's district may feel particularly responsible for candor when talking to a board member from the searching district. Some tips may help:

1. Have questions written out. They should be pertinent, job related.
2. Call former employers as well as current employers.
3. Try to make the calls at a time and place that will be free of interruptions.
4. Be sure to clarify that you are talking to the appropriate person.
5. Try to establish a friendly atmosphere in beginning the conversation.
6. Ask open ended questions.
7. Ask for more than one example of the candidate's job performance across several dimensions of administration.
8. Be ready to probe for more information if a response seems incomplete or unclear.
9. Be alert to responses that seem deliberately vague; try to follow up with that person or someone else regarding the topic.
10. Ask if the person would hire or recommend the candidate again and why or why not?
11. Ask about areas of weakness or areas in which growth is needed.
12. Ask about relationships with other people and groups (secretaries, teachers, administrators, custodians, etc.).
13. Ask for examples of the candidate's common sense, wisdom, leadership.
14. **BE WELL PREPARED TO MAKE NOTES AS YOU TALK.**

Appendix 3 (D)

Sample Questions for School Board Visitations to Finalists' Districts

In virtually all superintendent searches, the board of the searching district will wish to visit the school district or other place of employment for finalists. The finalist should take responsibility for arranging appointments, a place or itinerary for the discussions and a method for selecting a few people not expecting to serve as references. These are discussions and not interviews, they should be relaxed and friendly. Visiting board members should work at gaining useful information while being sensitive to preserving working relationships for the finalist in the home district or job setting.

Questions to ask Board Members:

1. How did the candidate help you to be an effective, cohesive board? What specific things did he or she do that helped you work together — especially when you were facing difficult issues?
2. How did the candidate communicate with individual board members? How did the candidate communicate with the board as a whole? Do you feel you were adequately informed?
3. How did the candidate deal with conflict? Please describe a situation and how it was handled.
4. How did the candidate deal with disappointments, minor set-backs or decisions that did not work out well?
5. Has the district experienced major financial difficulties? How did the candidate work with these problems?
6. How did the candidate involve the board in decision making? Please describe a major decision or problem that was addressed and explain how the candidate involved you?
7. Please explain the relationship between the board chair and the candidate; between the candidate and other board members. How did the candidate approach situations when there was serious disagreement between board members?
8. How did the candidate deal with situation when the board seriously modified or rejected a recommendation?

Questions To Ask Principals:

1. Please describe your feelings toward the candidate. Can you give examples of your relationship, situations that were dealt with well or poorly? What are the greatest strengths and most evident weaknesses of this candidate?
2. How does the candidate include and work with district administrators in the decision making process? How have you been involved? How often do you meet as administrators and what do you discuss?
3. How frequently do you turn to the candidate for advice, information, etc.? What are the results of such requests?
4. How did the candidate deal with complaints about you or your staff?
5. How would you describe the way that people feel about the candidate? Staff, students, parents, board members.

Questions to ask Community Leaders/PTA/Advisory Group Leaders:

1. In what ways does the candidate make an effort to obtain community and parent input and to involve advisory groups in the decision making process?
2. How accessible is the candidate to community groups and individuals?
3. Can you describe how the candidate has handled the implementation of unpopular decisions?

4. What is the prevalent feeling about the candidate in the community?
5. What are some accomplishments during the candidate's work here?

Questions to ask Teachers:

1. What do you consider to be the strengths of the candidate as an administrator?
2. How does the candidate provide teachers opportunities to be heard, to be involved in decision making? How has the candidate handled situations in which teachers disagreed with district policy?
3. What are the most significant accomplishments of the district during the candidate's work here?
4. Please describe the relationships between the candidate and the bargaining unit? The union leadership?

Questions to ask a Secretary:

1. What do you appreciate most about working with the candidate? What are the greatest strengths? What kinds of tasks are the candidate's favorites? What tasks are least liked?
2. Please describe your working relationship with the candidate.
3. Please describe the candidate's relationship with the board, district level administrators, principals, teachers, students, support staff, parents, the media.
4. What are some things the candidate could work to improve?

Appendix 4

Considerations Regarding Board-Superintendent Relations

The philosophical views of the board regarding the nature of board-superintendent relations are critical to the superintendent search process, the type of person who will best fit the school district and the performance of the superintendent following selection. While much of the relationship will be dynamic and developed over time, there are principles that should considered along the way.

Effective public education requires strong school boards and strong superintendents who willing assume leadership roles. In a very real sense, the success of students is directly related to the positive nature of the board-superintendent partnership. The board and superintendent are a team; its strength is dependent upon informed, intelligent and balanced cooperation.

It is important for the board and superintendent to have a clear understanding of their respective roles, to agree on them and to carry them out. The board and superintendent should have a plan in place with mutually agreed upon goals. To achieve the goals, the board should serve as a legislative body in the development and evaluation of policies and the superintendent should be responsible for administration of the school district in accordance with board policies. This balance of work may not always be clear cut, but the distinctions should be observed as the fundamental precept for the district.

Factors affecting roles and responsibilities:

The board and superintendent should recognize that the distinction between policymaking and administrative function is not always clear cut as indicated above. There are some considerations, however, that if kept in mind can help make the working relationships generally well balanced and successful.

- **The nature of policy development and administration.** Serving as the professional adviser to the school board is one of the key roles the superintendent plays. Although the board is not bound to accept the superintendent's advice, it nonetheless should always consult the superintendent as its chief advisor and give the most serious consideration to that advice. In a similar vein, the superintendent should not institute far-reaching administrative procedures without board involvement. The emphasis should be on communication and respect for the roles and responsibilities of each party.
- **The discretionary authority boards grant their chief administrators.** The board is responsible by law for school programs and operations. The board is also responsible to select and employ a superintendent. The board is expected to delegate authority to the superintendent that permits that individual to administer the school system effectively, to meet the board's policies and comply with legal requirements. The degree of granted authority is a judgment and varies depending upon the specific function involved. As a general guideline or touchstone to assess how realistic this division of authority is one can reasonably expect the following: the board must give the professional school administrator enough authority to carry out designated responsibilities and the administrator must give the board adequate assurance that the jobs the board designated are being accomplished. The vehicle for defining a sensible delegation is board policy and a working agreement between the board and superintendent.
- **The increasing influence of external factors on local school district governance and on the board-superintendent relationship.** Legislative mandates from the state level have grown an increasingly powerful determinant on how a school district is administered. The passage of educational reform dictates the educational agenda for students and staff. The allocation of state funds with related compliance requirements governs the budget of the school district. The amount of federal funds available and the restrictions attached to them further define school dis-

trict programs. And, the superintendent must respond periodically to situations in which there may be no policy or precedent.

- **The necessity that the school board control and be perceived as in control of its own meetings.** The school board is an integral of American representative government; indeed, it is arguably the most accessible and responsive unit of government in America. The meetings of the board are governed by the Open Meetings Act (Ch. 42.30 RCW) and are public except where executive session is expressly permitted. The vast majority of the board's business must be conducted in public, but the meeting itself is a meeting of the board in public. The purpose of the meeting is to carry out necessary business functions and public participation should be a limited portion of the meeting. The school board chair/president, after consultation with the superintendent, is expected to conduct the meeting in an orderly way and to work through the set agenda.
- **The need for the superintendent to act and be perceived to be the district's chief executive and professional educational leader**. The superintendent serves as the district's chief executive, the district's leader in terms of educational program, staff and the primary counselor to the board. The board is to hold the superintendent accountable for effective operation of the schools and school district. The board's support for the superintendent should be made clear and unequivocal. There are opportunities for the board and superintendent to refine relationships, but mutual support is critical.

Details of the Roles and Responsibilities

The School Board — within a general framework, boards have the following responsibilities, related to the board-superintendent relationship.

- To delegate to the superintendent responsibility for school district administrative functions.
- To hold the superintendent responsible for administration of the school district through regular, constructive, written and oral assessment of the superintendent's work. Effective evaluation is an ongoing effort and should be linked to goals established by the board with the assistance of the superintendent.
- To support the superintendent in decisions that conform to professional standards and board policy.
- To provide the superintendent a written employment contract.
- To give the superintendent the benefit of the board's counsel in matters related to individual board members' expertise, familiarity with the local school system and community.
- To hold all board meetings with the superintendent or his or her designee present, among others, except when addressing matters involving the superintendent's employment relationship or on advice of legal counsel.
- To consult with the superintendent on matters that concern the school system and on which the board may take action.
- To develop a plan for board-superintendent communications.
- To channel communications from school employees through the superintendent and to refer applications, complaints and other communications of an administrative nature (oral or written) first to the superintendent.
- To take action on matters only after hearing the superintendent's recommendations.
- To establish a policy for effectively responding to complaints.
- To provide the superintendent sufficient administrative help, especially in the area of monitoring teaching and learning.
- To encourage and support the superintendent in his or her efforts to participate in professional development through the local, state and national professional associations.

The Superintendent — within the general framework described above — has the following responsibilities, related to the board-superintendent relationship.

- To serve as the board's chief executive officer and advisor. To serve as the school system's educational leader.
- To keep the board informed about school operations and programs.
- To interpret the needs of the school system to the board.
- To present policy options, along with specific recommendations, to the board when circumstances require the board to adopt new policies or revise existing policies.
- To develop administrative procedures needed to implement board policy and to inform the board of these procedures.
- To develop an effective program of school-community relations. This should include keeping the community informed about board policies, actions, school programs and other developments of importance.
- To manage the district's day to day operations.
- To evaluate personnel and keep the board informed about evaluations.
- To encourage school board members to participate in board training activities through state and national associations.

Appendix 4 (A)

Working Agreement Between the Board and Superintendent

In addition to the formal superintendent contract and board policy, it may be helpful for the board and superintendent to establish an agreement about how they will work together. The statements below are examples of principles that may help support an effective working relationship.

The Board of Directors and the Superintendent of _____ School District have formed the following Working Agreement which states commonly held expectations that will support success for all concerned.

1. The Board will meet regularly at _____ p.m., the ____ day(s) of each month.
2. The superintendent shall insure that the agenda and supporting documents for each board meeting shall be (mailed/hand delivered/picked up) by ____ p.m. on the _____ (day) preceding the meeting. The agenda shall include a consent section.
3. The board members agree to read all agenda items before each meeting and to ask questions when clarification is needed so that the board meeting can proceed smoothly and efficiently.
4. Board members agree that they are to contact the superintendent by phone or in person to talk prior to a board meeting about any agenda item which needs to be clarified.
5. The board chair and superintendent shall meet prior to each board meeting to develop the agenda and procedures for the meeting.
6. The board members agree to cast their votes based upon their understanding of the questions being voted upon and to publicly support decisions arrived at by a majority of the board even though a board member may not have been in favor of a motion.
7. The superintendent, in addition to his or her presentations, is encouraged to have district personnel present topics at meetings to provide a representative picture of school district operations.
8. Executive sessions will be used for those purposes stated in the law.
9. An executive session to discuss superintendent performance may be requested by either the board or superintendent.
10. All discussions that occur during executive session are confidential and shall not be shared.
11. The superintendent shall provide to all board members an organization chart for the district that shows each position by title, the name of the person holding the position and the date the person began working in the position. The superintendent pledges to update the board on district organization periodically.
12. The superintendent and the board will mutually agree upon a statement that details who shall be responsible for the district during the superintendent's absences. Prior to a significant absence, the superintendent shall notify the board and staff of dates of absence from the district and who is to assume responsibility.
13. In case of emergency, the superintendent and/or his appointed representatives shall notify all school board members about the emergency and actions taken.
14. The superintendent shall distribute a monthly calendar that includes the dates, names and purpose of absence of district administrators who will be attending professional association meetings and/or workshops.
15. Each board member recognizes that he or she has no power or right to make individual promises that would be binding upon the board or district.
16. A board member will report all complaints to the appropriate administrator or superintendent for information and action as needed.

17. If a person complains to a board member, the board member shall advise the complainant to go to directly to the subject of the complaint, to proceed on to the principal or supervisor if necessary and to go to the superintendent if still dissatisfied. Board members will advise the superintendent of complaints received.
18. The school board members and superintendent shall actively support the Washington State School Directors Association, its programs and services and participate in the annual conference when responsibilities permit.
19. This "Working Agreement" shall be reviewed periodically as determined by the board and superintendent.

Appendix 4 (B)

WSSDA Model Policy No. 1620
The Board of Directors

THE BOARD-SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP

The successful operation of schools requires a close, effective working relationship between the board and the superintendent. The relationship must be one of trust, good will and candor. As the legally designated governing body, the board retains final authority within the district. The board exercises those powers that are expressly required by law and those implied by law. The superintendent is the board's professional advisor to whom the board delegates executive responsibility and such powers as may be required to manage the district in a manner consistent with board policy and state and federal law.

The superintendent, as executive officer of the board, shall be responsible for the administration of the schools under applicable laws and policies of the district. The board shall delineate the duties of the superintendent and shall use them as the basis for evaluating the superintendent's performance. Unless specifically limited, the superintendent may delegate to other staff the exercise of any powers and the discharge of any duties imposed by district policy or a vote of the board. The delegation of power or duty shall not relieve the superintendent of responsibility for the actions taken under such a delegation.

In order to perform their responsibilities, board members must be familiar with the operations within the schools. The superintendent shall establish communication procedures which can enhance the board member's understanding of student programs and school operations.

Legal References:	RCW 28A.320.010	Corporate Powers
	RCW 28A.330.100	Additional powers of the board (First Class Districts Only)
	RCW 28A.400.010	Employment of superintendent — Superintendent's qualifications, general powers, term, contract renewal
	RCW 28A.400.030	Superintendent's duties

Appendix 4 (C)

WSSDA Model Procedure 1620

Board-Staff Communications

The following communications procedures are established:

Staff Communications to the Board.
All communications or reports to the board or individual board members from principals, supervisors, teachers, or other staff members shall be submitted through the superintendent. This shall not deny any staff member's right to appeal to the board regarding administrative decisions, provided that the superintendent shall have been notified of the forthcoming appeal and that it is processed according to the applicable procedures on complaints and grievances.

Board Communications to Staff.
All official communications, policies, and directives of staff interest and concern will be communicated to staff members through the superintendent. The superintendent will employ all such media as are appropriate to keep staff fully informed of the board's priorities, concerns and actions.

Visits to Schools.
Individual board members interested in visiting schools or classrooms will make arrangements for visitations through the principals of the various schools. Such visits shall be regarded as expressions of interest in school affairs and not as "inspections" or visits for supervisory or administrative purposes. Official visits by board members will be carried on only under board authorization and with the full knowledge of staff, including the superintendent, principals and other supervisors.

Social Interaction.
Staff and board members share a keen interest in the schools and in education. When they meet at social affairs and other functions, informal discussion on such matters as educational trends, issues, and innovations and general district problems can be anticipated. Discussions of personalities or staff grievances are not appropriate.

Appendix 4 (D)

WSSDA Model Policy 1630
Board of Directors

EVALUATION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

The board shall establish evaluative criteria and shall be responsible for evaluating the performance of the superintendent as provided by statute.

The superintendent shall have the opportunity for confidential conferences with the board members on no less than three occasions in each school year, the purpose of which shall be the aiding of the superintendent in his/her performance. The board, on the basis of the evaluation, may renew and/or extend the superintendent's contract for periods not to exceed three years.

Legal References: RCW 28A.405.100 Minimum criteria for the evaluation of certificated employees, including administrators — Procedure — Scope — Penalty

Appendix 5

Model Superintendent Contract

This agreement, is entered into by and between the Board of Directors hereinafter called the "Board" of _____ School District No.___, _____County, Washington, hereinafter called the "District" and _____, herein after called the "Superintendent". The Board, in accordance with its action at its official meeting on the ____day of _____has and does hereby employ _____ as Superintendent.

WHEREAS, the District and the Superintendent desire to enter into a contract whereby the Superintendent will perform services as such for the District for a period of three (3) years, July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2004, on terms and conditions acceptable to both parties; and

WHEREAS, each year of the contract shall include 260 work days minus paid holidays and paid vacation days for an actual work year of at least _____ days; and

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the mutual covenants and agreements hereinafter contained, the parties agree as follows:

EMPLOYMENT: In consideration of an annual salary of $ _____ for the period of July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002, the Superintendent agrees to faithfully perform the duties of the Superintendent of the School District as prescribed by the laws of the State of Washington and by the policies, rules, and regulations made there under by the Board, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Education. The annual salary shall be paid in twelve (12) monthly installments in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Board.

The District shall pay to the Superintendent during the periods July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003 and July 1, 2003 through June 30, 2004 such salary and benefits as may be mutually agreed upon between the parties, but which shall not be less than the rate of salary and benefits provided for the period July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002.

DISCHARGE: The Superintendent agrees to devote his/her time, skill, labor and attention to the duties of the Superintendent of the School District. During the term of this agreement, the Superintendent will be subject to discharge for cause, provided, however, that the Board shall comply with all conditions of this contract and with all applicable provisions provided by Washington State law.

ORGANIZATION OF STAFF: Subject to Board approval, the Superintendent will have complete freedom to organize, reorganize and arrange the administrative and supervisory staff, including instruction and business affairs, which in his/her judgment, best serves the school district. The responsibility for selection, placement and transfer of personnel shall be vested in the Superintendent subject to approval by the Board.

COMPLAINTS, CRITICISMS: The Board, individually and collectively, will refer promptly all criticism, complaints, and suggestions called to its attention to the Superintendent for study and recommendation.

OUTSIDE WORK: The Superintendent may with prior approval of the Board undertake consultative work, speaking engagements, writing, lecturing or other professional duties and obligations which do not conflict with the duties specified in this contract. The Superintendent shall use vacation days for such activities unless the Board agrees otherwise in advance.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: The Superintendent shall continue his/her professional development and may participate in relevant learning experiences, including attending professional meetings at the local, state and (with prior Board approval) national levels. Travel expenses associated with such meetings will be reimbursed in accordance with District policy.

PROFESSIONAL DUES, CIVIC ORGANIZATION DUES: The District shall pay the Superintendent's annual dues for membership in the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) and another association chosen by the Superintendent. In addition, the District shall pay the Superintendent's annual dues to one local (secular) civic organization of his/her choosing.

SICK LEAVE: The Superintendent shall be granted twelve (12) days of paid sick leave each year for illness, injury and emergencies to be used pursuant to district policy and law. Unused sick leave shall accumulate from year to year to the limit provided by law (180 days). Sick leave shall be eligible for buy back as provided by state law and if permitted for other employees of the school district.

VACATION: The Superintendent shall receive twenty-five (25) days of paid vacation per year. Vacation days shall be taken at reasonable times and the Board Chair/President shall be notified of the particular time being taken, in writing, in advance of the vacation days to be used. Vacation days may be accumulated from year to year up to a maximum of thirty (30) days. The Superintendent will be paid for accumulated vacation days at the time of termination of employment from the District at the per diem rate of his/her annual salary for that year. The per diem rate is calculated by subtracting the annual vacation days and the district recognized holidays from 260 and dividing the resulting figure into the gross annual salary for the Superintendent. The Superintendent shall be entitled to annually by June 30th buy back up to 10 vacation days per year at the per diem rate of his/her annual salary for that year.

Upon retirement, up to 30 paid vacation days may be used as salary for retirement calculations as per State retirement laws and guidelines. The Superintendent's rights to compensation for vacation at the time of retirement shall be interpreted to avoid excess compensation billings to the district from a retirement system. This latter limitation applies to those covered by Plan 1 of the Teachers Retirement System.

BENEFITS: The Superintendent shall receive at least medical, dental, vision and other benefits equivalent to the amount paid by the State to the district for each FTE certificated employee. The Superintendent shall also receive the number of paid holidays consistent with school district practice and state law. In light of the unique nature of the professional duties of the Superintendent of Schools, the District agrees to provide for the driving responsibilities and costs of the Superintendent in one of the following ways:

1. An automobile will be provided by the District for use by the Superintendent for all work related travel; the District will pay all costs of the automobile including purchase, operation, insurance and maintenance/repair. **(Or)**
2. The District will pay the Superintendent $ _____ per month for operation of his/her personal automobile for work related travel within the school system and community. **(Or)**
3. The District will reimburse the Superintendent for all business travel at the current mileage rate recognized by the IRS.

(A preferred approach is to simply have the overall salary of the Superintendent increased by a figure arrived at between the parties and have absolutely no travel stipend at all.)

MEDICAL EXAM: The Superintendent agrees to receive a comprehensive medical examination during every other year of the term of this contract, with the cost of the examination first coordinated with the District provided medical insurance and any remaining cost paid by the District. A statement by a qualified physician, certifying to the medical fitness of the Superintendent for the duties required of the position, shall be filed with the Board after such physical examination, which statement shall be treated as confidential information by the Board.

RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT: The Superintendent agrees to reside in the District by no later than _____. The District shall reimburse the Superintendent up to a maximum of _____ for moving expenses. The Superintendent will present an itemized statement, with copies of receipts, when seeking reimbursement for moving expenses.

EVALUATION AND EXTENSION OF CONTRACT: The Board shall evaluate the Superintendent's performance by devoting all or a portion of at least one meeting no later than January 31st, and all or a portion of at least one meeting no later than June 15 of each contract year to a discussion of the working relationship between the Superintendent and the Board, along with the Board's evaluation of the Superintendent's performance.

The Board evaluation of the Superintendent's performance shall reference annual goals and objectives for the Superintendent which shall be discussed and agreed upon by the Board and Superintendent by August 1 of each year for the coming school year.

No later than February 1st, of each Contract year, the Board will review the Superintendent's employment status to determine whether to offer the Superintendent an extended Contract or, alternatively, to allow the present contract to continue toward its expiration date. The Board will also by June 1st determine whether an increase shall be made in the annual salary for the Superintendent. Any increase in annual salary made during the life of this contract shall be in the form of an amendment and shall become a part of this contract.

DISABILITY: It is conceivable that the Superintendent might be unable to perform some or all of the duties required by this Contract by reason of illness, accident or other cause beyond his/her control. If such disability extends beyond available Washington sick leave and vacation days, the Board may consider whether this Contract should be altered. If the Board chooses to consider an alteration of this contract due to the perceived disability of the Superintendent and that alteration is not mutually agreeable between the parties, the degree of disability must be determined by a certified physician. The physician may be a person selected by mutual agreement between the parties or, if mutual agreement cannot be reached, by a certified physician selected by the local Educational Service District Superintendent. If the physician determines that the Superintendent is disabled, the Board may reduce the workload and salary proportionate to the determined degree of disability. If the Superintendent is determined to be completely disabled and there remains no Washington sick leave nor unused vacation, the Board may act to place the Superintendent on long-term disability leave. Following placement of the Superintendent on long-term disability leave, the respective duties, rights and obligations of this Contract shall terminate.

HOLD HARMLESS: The Board agrees, as a further condition of the Superintendent's employment contract, that it will defend, hold harmless and indemnify the Superintendent, his or her spouse and marital community from any and all third party demands, claims, suits, actions, damages, costs, charges and expenses, including court costs and attorney's fees; provided that the incident out of which such demands, claims, suits, actions, damages, costs, charges and expenses arise have occurred while the Superintendent is acting within the scope of his or her employment and during the good faith performance of his or her contract. The District shall provide the Superintendent with a legal defense provided that if a conflict exists between the legal position of the Superintendent and the District, the Superintendent may, with the concurrence and agreement of the Board, obtain independent counsel which reasonable fees thereof shall be indemnified by the District if the Superintendent is entitled to a defense as provided above. This provision is not intended to apply to any dispute or legal action of any kind between the Superintendent and the District. Entitlement to costs, damages, and/or fees of any nature, including attorney's fees in all such disputes and actions between the Superintendent and the District which may arise, shall be the responsibility of the District only to the degree required by the laws of the State of Washington.

SAVINGS CLAUSE: If any provision of this Contract should be found contrary to law, the remainder of the contract shall continue in effect.

This Contract represents the total agreement between the parties regarding the employment of the Superintendent by the Board and there are no verbal agreements which modify its terms.

Accepted this _____ day of _____, 20____

By: _____
Superintendent

ACCEPTANCE APPROVED ON _____, 20

By the Board of Directors of _____ School District

By: _____
Board Chair

_____
Board Vice-Chair

_____
Member

_____
Member

_____
Member

Washington State School Directors' Association
221 College Street NE
Olympia, WA 98516-5313
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